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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMEN
OF AGRICULTUR
OFFICE OF INFORMATIC

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Subject: Wartime Holiday Sweets. Information from the home economists of the United States Department of Agriculture.

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Are you planning to make candy this Christmas?

If you are, you'll want to get out that well-known pencil and paper now, because in a minute, I'm going to run over a few of the recipes developed and tested by the United States Department of Agriculture's home economists. These recipes'll give you good returns for the amount of sugar they take. And there's no need to say any more about sugar.

But in the meantime, while you're hunting for a pencil, let's have a general candy making quiz. The first question's easy enough. What one thing do all candy makers try to get in most of their candies? It's a point that many different kinds of home-made candies call for. The answer, of course, is smoothness. Be it mints or fudge or taffy or what-not, we don't want any lumps or bumps or big grains of sugar in the part that's supposed to be smooth.

The next question's a bit more difficult. It's how can you make candies smooth? Now the USDA home economists have several suggestions on that. One of them is to cook candy in a perfectly smooth saucepan large enough to allow it to "boil up".

Another is to cook these candies without stirring them after the sugar's once dissolved. Stirring, you know, may spatter sirup on the sides of the saudepan. And when that happens, it dries and forms crystals which may fall back in the sirup and make candy grainy.

Here's a third tip on how to make candy smooth. During the first two or three minutes of cooking, cover the sirup. That helps hold the steam, you see, and it washes down any sugar crystals that might form on the sides of the saucepan.

Also, if you wipe all sugar crystals from the sides of the pan as the sirup boils, you'll keep them out of the sirup and insure its smoothness. To wipe the crystals away, all you need is a fork wrapped in a damp cloth. Then we can easily draw the crystals out of the pan and away from the surface of the sirup. Dip the fork in clear water, and the crystals'll either come off or they'll dissolve. The

thing to remember is to do this often while the candy is cooking.

One of the surest ways to keep candy from being grainy is to cook it to the correct temperature...no more...no less. This is simple if you have a candy thermometer. But it's not hard if you keep testing a little bit of the sirup in very cold water. Just drop a tiny bit of the sirup in a cup of cold water and shape it with the fingers into a ball, or watch how the sirup separates into threads when it strikes the water. You can tell from the kind of ball it makes or from the way the threads separate whether or not the candy has boiled enough.

Another thing. Don't beat candy as soon as it comes off the stove. Let it cool a little. Beating very hot candy tends to make it grainy.

Finally, don't scrape the pan when the sirup is being poured out. Just empty it of all the sirup that flows readily. If you watch those points, you're pretty sure to have smooth candy for a finished product.

One more question before we get to the recipes. Many candy recipes call for part sugar and part corn sirup or honey or molasses. What's the purpose in using these other sweets? This'll surprise you. It did me. Saving sugar? No...that's not the real reason, although some sugar is saved. Flavor? That may be partly the reason, but it's still not the main one. The main reason for using those other sweets is because they keep granulated sugar from forming large crystals and help make candy smooth.

By the way, speaking of molasses. Whenever you're using it or brown sugar in a recipe calling for milk too, remember to stir the candy constantly while it's cooking. Molasses and brown sugar contain an acid that may curdle the milk unless it's stirred.

Now for those recipes. Are you ready to take them down?

Here's one for <u>peanut clusters</u> that calls for no sugar at all. It takes one-half cup of dark corn sirup, one fourth cup molasses, an eighth of a teaspoon of salt, one tablespoon of vinegar, two tablespoons of table fat and two and a half cups of shelled roasted peanuts. Let's check back over those to be sure you've gotten them. One-half cup of dark corn sirup, one fourth cup of molasses, an eighth teaspoon of salt, with one tablespoon of vinegar, two tablespoons of some table fat and two and a half cups of roasted peanuts. First mix the corn sirup, molasses, salt and vinegar. Cook them to 240 degrees, Farenheit or until a small

quantity in water forms a soft ball. Then add the table fat and pour the mixture over the nut meats. Now you have to work fast to get the nuts and the candy thoroughly mixed before it hardens. After they're well-mixed, drop tablespoonfuls on a greased surface. This will make twenty pieces of candy.

This next recipe is foolproof. And it adds delicious variety to other sweeter confections. It's called fruit balls. First, wash and dry one cup prunes and one and a half cups of seeded raising. (If your prunes are extra dry, soften them a little in water.) Add a half cup nut meats if you like. Grind through meat chopper, using medium knife. Mix well with one tablespoon of lemon juice and a few grains of salt. Make into balls, one rounded tablespoon of the mixture to a ball. Then roll them in sugar. Store in a tin box or tight jar until you're ready to serve them. If you'd like, you can substitute other dried fruits...figs ...apricots...or dates for either the prunes or raisins. It's an easy confection to make and you don't have to cook it. What's more, it's fine for children.

If having the children help make candy strikes you as a good idea, here's an excellent recipe. It's molasses taffy. And you know from experience that nothing's more fun to youngsters than pulling taffy. The recipe calls for one and a half cups of sugar, a half cup of molasses, one and a half cups of water, two tablespoons of vinegar, half teaspoon of cream of tartar, four tablespoons table fat, an eighth of a teaspoon of salt and a fourth teaspoon of soda. First, boil the sugar, molasses, water, vinegar and cream of tartar to the soft crack stage. That'd be 270 degrees Farenheit. When it reaches the soft crack stage, add the fat, salt and soda. Pour it into an oiled pan.

Then's when the fun comes in. As soon as the candy's cool enough to handle, parcel it out to the children and let them pull it until it's light colored. It'll become very light and porous if it's pulled long enough. When it's reached that point, cut it into pieces about once inch long...(if there's any left by that time.) If there is...you'll have some fine candy and you'll have occupied the children pleasantly for the whole afternoon.

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